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TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 7058  
INFO RUEHZL/EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE IMMEDIATE  
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC IMMEDIATE  
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHINGTON DC IMMEDIATE  
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHINGTON DC IMMEDIATE  
RHMFISS/HQ USEUCOM VAIHINGEN GE IMMEDIATE  
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHINGTON DC IMMEDIATE  
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHINGTON DC IMMEDIATE

S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 MINSK 000215

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STATE FOR D, P, M, EUR, CA, DS, DGHR

E.O. 12958: DECL: 03/25/2033  
TAGS: [PREL](#) [OFDP](#) [AMGT](#) [CMGT](#) [BO](#)  
SUBJECT: REGIME TO DEMAND EMBASSY STAFF REDUCTION TO  
FIVE/FIVE: GUIDANCE REQUEST

REF: A. MOORE-BOEHME TELCON 03/25/08  
[1](#)B. MINSK 208  
[1](#)C. STATE 30493

Classified By: Charge Jonathan Moore for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

[1](#)1. (S/NF) As reported ref A, Presidential Foreign Policy Advisor Valentin Rybakov informed Charge March 25 that unless the U.S. reversed the guidance issued by the U.S. treasury Department's Office of Foreign Assets Control March 6, Charge would be summoned to the MFA on Monday March 31 and informed of the following:

-- Based on the deterioration of diplomatic relations between the United States and Belarus, the GOB would reduce their staff at the Belarusian Embassy in Washington and the Belarusian Consulate General in New York to five/five persons.

-- The U.S. Embassy in Minsk would be "requested" to reduce its staff to five/five U.S. diplomats by the afternoon of April 7, 2008. In the event the Embassy did not comply, staff would be declared persona non grata.

[1](#)2. (S/NF) Charge told Rybakov that this was a grave mistake which would further damage Belarus' standing. Rybakov was unrepentant and stated only that this was a decision by Lukashenko himself. Upon returning to the Embassy, Charge briefed country team and received concurrence to present the following options to the interagency.

Option One: Move to Five Positions by April 7  
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[1](#)3. (S/NF) The Embassy's country team (A/DCM, AID, RSO, RAO, DATT, MGT, AMB OMS) supports this option: even if the Embassy ends up being closed in the near future, the best way to prepare for that is to accede to the request in the interim and submit a list of five positions to remain. While classified processing would have to be suspended, that would permit us to make the necessary arrangements to safeguard, transport, and protect valuable Embassy property and sensitive (SBU) information; the transport of classified equipment and materials is already well underway in anticipation of the previously required drawdown to 17 American staff (ref A). It would also give us a policy upper hand: when we are ready to shut down, we give the GOB an ultimatum to close their Embassy and Consulate General in the U.S. instead of being subject to their dictates. A list of the potential five positions has been e-mailed to Ambassador

Karen Stewart in EUR/UMB.

Option Two: Move to Close All Operations by April 7  
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¶4. (S/NF) The Embassy's country team does not support this option. Closing post on/by April 7 would be cast by the regime as the ultimate sign of U.S. weakness. (A delay in doing so, as in Option 1, would allow us to plan for closure and tie that step to the regime's next human rights outrage, rather than to diplomats' pique.) It would also result in the abandonment of considerable amounts of Embassy property including unclassified computer equipment and much of our motor pool (as well as much of the personal property of our American staff). Large amounts of SBU information -- financial and personnel files, as well as visa applications -- that would be ideally destroyed or archived elsewhere would have to be abandoned. It must also be mentioned that our local staff -- already the only LES in Europe that receive a 7% Unique Conditions of Work Allowance, on the basis of the constant harassment they face from the local authorities -- would suffer greatly if we are not able at a minimum to make arrangements for a protecting power in the form of a European embassy, make final salary payments/severance payments, and in some cases process them for special immigrant visas.

Action Requests  
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¶5. (S/NF) In addition to obtaining interagency decision on which option to pursue in paras 3 and 4 above, post requests the following on an immediate basis:

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-- State Department/DS guidance regarding the timing for the suspension of classified operations (one agency at post has already initiated this process);

-- State Department authorization for all/all employees to pack out/"safehaven" HHE.

Comment  
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¶6. (U) This Embassy is proud to be bearing the brunt of the dictatorship's reaction to the policy we all support and have been honored to carry out. All of us at post are deeply thankful for the personal sentiments expressed by the Secretary (ref C) and the profound assistance of State

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Department and other agencies as we work through this difficult time.  
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